



# Emergency Management **UPDATE**

June 2000



## EM wins with Stafford revision

by George Foresman  
*VDES Deputy State Coordinator*

**Y**ou've made it to the final round of the special emergency management edition of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire." For the big money, Regis asks you to name a typical disaster falling under the provisions of the Stafford Act.

Even before you look at the choices, you know there is no such thing as a typical disaster. You also know that we've had and continue to respond to a lot of events that don't fit into clean categories (airline crashes, extended search and rescue, unanticipated and non-criminal release of material into the environment).

That's just one of many deficiencies proposed revisions to the Stafford Act seek to address to prevent victims and localities from becoming the big losers when these events occur.

Though these revisions are still under congressional review, it is not too early to assess trends and contemplate the impacts locally. Three major themes are emerging in disaster law that promise to shift more of the burden for mitigation, response and recovery down to the local level. As your state partners, we want you to be prepared to meet these challenges head on.

### **"Earn James Lee Witt's Money" (Mitigation)**

Proposed revisions to the Stafford Act will attempt to institutionalize mitigation across the states, and financial incentives will play a big role in this process. You may soon see the federal government identify sections of the U.S. that are prone to the greatest hazards and create natural hazard zones.

States would then be measured against a standard and rated on their "disaster effectiveness." This consistent approach to risk assessment would offer one-stop shopping for all hazards. States

that score well could reap financial rewards such as lower insurance rates and increase the likelihood of federal construction projects in their areas.

Another intent of these statutory requirements is to ensure a uniform approach to administering and implementing a catastrophic insurance pool and encouraging responsible land use, construction standards and building codes. As state-level regulation is subject to variations, this will pose a challenge to the insurance industry.

Change won't happen overnight, and we will always have to deal with the issue of past development. However, the trend toward making federal assistance supplementary to insurance is one that we can't ignore. Flood insurance is readily available and it's just good moral reasoning for the government and private sectors (even those not in identified flood plains) to have it.

### **"The Price is Right" (Disaster Assistance Delivery)**

At the recent Virginia Emergency Management Conference, VDES State Coordinator Michael Cline advised attendees about a potential shift of focus in Public Assistance programs to the local level to allow states to manage the recovery process themselves.

"As you know, FEMA inspectors used to visit each site to compile damage survey reports," says Cline. "Though their state and local counterparts were a part of the team, FEMA took the lead in facilitating this assessment. They also offered opportunities afterward to go back and make changes to the figures in these damage surveys.

"In the new program, this focus is pretty much reversed with project worksheets being developed by localities with state and federal technical support. Communities will get a quicker turnaround [with the new system] but will trade away any opportunity for follow-up changes as the initial local assessment goes forward 'as is' in so-called small disasters — under \$48,900.

"Given the greater potential for something to go wrong with these cost figures, localities that have not had a Public Assistance declaration recently need to take a look at the program requirements. In the long run, however, the new system allows the local government, as the disaster victim, to determine the best approach to its own recovery."

This effort to focus dollars down to infrastructure to implement recovery minimizes the cost of administration for disaster assistance and can increase efficiency. *(continued on page 4)*

# Focusing on fundamentals “inside the box”

By Ralph Jones, Director  
VDES Technological Hazards Division

“Thinking outside the box” is a popular term used these days in trying to energize innovation. It is absolutely essential that we remain in an innovative frame of reference because of the citizens we serve and the accountability we have to the public trust.

Not only must we stay on the leading edge of proven technology, but we are obligated alternatively to constantly seek solutions which are better, more prudent and conserve resources. We need to be careful, however, as we travel this path of logic.

There are many things that are “inside the box” that must not be ignored or forgotten. Inside the box is where we are. We are there because of the fundamental core values that most of us possess through having been taught by our families or learned in some other setting.

They are the foundation of our beliefs and the ethics by which we live our lives. These values and ethics translate directly to the workplace and are manifested in how we perform, how we treat people, how we lead and the ultimate decisions we make.

While we cultivate innovative thought and action, we must not ignore the little red schoolhouse where fundamentals are taught



and learned. It is far too easy to wander outside of the box and get involved with the interesting and the unusual at the expense of adhering to fundamentals. Fundamentals need to be taught, learned, practiced and evaluated. Only after we master fundamentals do we really have the liberty for innovation.

It is vital that we keep the hazmat business focused on fundamentals. Without the mastery of fundamentals, we have ill-trained people with poorly maintained equipment led by inept leaders who make bad decisions.

The statewide hazmat program bears its success and exceptional reputation because of responders, leaders, program managers and advisory councils who have their eyes and minds focused on the details of daily fundamentals. They develop, teach, practice, evaluate and modify with a view toward protection of the public, critical systems and the environment.

This focus is now based on years of professional observation, critique and on-the-street experience. We must never let our guard down by allowing distractions of gadgetry and unproven techniques to become our focus.

As leaders and program managers, we must channel innovative thought to enhance the fundamentals on which the safety of the citizens and our responders so necessarily depend.

## Hometown newspapers: Your essential EM partners



By Jamie Brown, Editorial Supervisor  
Byerly Publications, Franklin, Va.

Following the disastrous flooding in Franklin, Southampton and Isle of Wight counties this past September, I met with VDES and FEMA officials to provide an assessment of sorts of their actions during the flood.

After acknowledging the vast amount of assistance from public affairs officers, I had some comments about the effects of delays in disseminating valuable information to area residents at the time they needed it most.

Communication between those who have vital information and those who need it is essential, and the best method of facilitating that dialogue is to establish a partnership between emergency services and the local media.

It may be easy to overlook the fact that, as prepared as state and local officials may be for an emergency situation, residents in an impacted area are not. They are in shock. They are confused. They do not know which way to turn and are even less aware of why they are turning in any particular direction.

Much of the information victims of a disaster need to know will not change much from one locality to another, from one type of disaster to another. That early information should be distributed to local media as quickly as possible.

In order to reach as many people as possible, state emergency management officials should have a list of what media serve every community in the Commonwealth. Whether the media is a daily or weekly newspaper, radio or television, emergency officials need to know several things:

- ☐ Who is in charge?
- ☐ What are the deadlines?
- ☐ In what format should information be provided?
- ☐ What type of information is desired by the media?

In the newspaper industry, deadlines govern everything. Frequently, when information is needed, it is needed then, not the next day. It is important to know what the deadlines are and provide the most up-to-date information as possible.

While a particular decision by emergency officials may be made on a Wednesday and the nondaily newspaper is published on a Tuesday, the information will be a week old before the community reads about it. Is that the most current information they need, or could it be updated? That is when knowing the deadlines is helpful to emergency officials.

Most community newspapers operate with a small staff. In a disaster, not only must that information be obtained and distributed, other daily duties must be tended to as well. I can't think of any newspaper that would not welcome informative or human-interest articles.

Another plus for local media would be to have a single contact person with emergency services. (continued on page 3)



# Hampton Call Center takes burden off 911

**T**ag, hot potato, hide-and-seek. While they may be great children's games, adults rarely enjoy playing them on the phone — especially when trying to interact with government agencies.

With its 311 Customer Call Center, the city of Hampton is the first in the state and seventh in the nation to offer centralized one-stop shopping for answers to all local government related questions/services.

Established late last year, the center is the city's attempt to end the age of the "faceless bureaucrat" and enter the era of "customer delight."

"We wanted to provide one number that is easy to remember to report problems to the city," says Call Center Coach Liz Nisley. "Customers can tell the story once and it's taken care of conveniently."

Nisley says the call center concept is rooted in a 1998 reengineering study that looked at improving processes and identifying priorities.

"The study concluded that, though Hampton does a good job of providing services for citizens, customers had a hard

.....  
**Newspaper (cont'd from page 2)**

That source could provide necessary information or at least know who should be contacted for specific information. That list could be provided during the first contact between emergency services and the media.

During the September flood here, federal, state and local emergency officials were extremely helpful to us. The services provided were valuable.

I believe that by implementing the suggestions noted here, those services would become more invaluable to those who need help the most — the victims.

**Editor's Note:** Byerly Publications publishes eight weekly and twice-weekly newspapers in Southeastern and Southside Virginia, including "The Tidewater News" serving the city of Franklin and the counties of Southampton and Isle of Wight. It never missed a deadline during the flood.

Brown originally addressed this topic at the 2000 VEM Conference and has summarized his message here for the benefit of the entire state EM community.



*"Seeing Delight." Call Center Operator Nellie Walton provides one-stop shopping for Hampton residents seeking city services.*

time interacting with local government," explains Nisley.

"In the era of 24-hour banking and online shopping, residents couldn't access these services beyond normal business hours. When they did reach someone, they often had to contact multiple departments and agencies on the same issue."

The 311 Call Center eliminates that problem by employing trained operators who use several sophisticated databases to actually provide the information needed or start the service request process.

Nisley says operators use a service request module to take down all necessary information and can even promise service delivery time.

Pooling the talents of the top customer service representatives from across the breadth of city government, Nisley says the call center opened the week Hurricane Floyd hit southeastern Virginia.

Operators like Nellie Walton had to hit the ground running with 40 hours of hands-on classroom training and past experience with another city department.

"We were so busy with different calls, we didn't have time to think about being nervous," says Walton. "We knew our departments but had to learn the rest. You get to talk to a lot of different people and it is never the same thing twice."

The center is staffed 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days a week, and will soon be operating on a 24-hour basis.

"We hope to provide 85 percent of customer needs here," says Nisley. "We did it during the January snowstorm and will be the central point of contact for the EOC during hurricane season."

Working as a team, she says the call center can provide information on evacuation routes and shelters while allowing 911 operators to concentrate on police, fire and emergency medical service requests during these storms.

Hampton 911 Commander Lt. Dave Ellis says the new system is working just that way. Though public works-related calls account for a small portion of their daily traffic, Ellis says they have seen a 70-percent decrease in volume on these types of queries.

"We handle the life and death issues such as downed power lines, gas leaks, hurricanes, and tornadoes," says Ellis.

"The 311 crew helps with the large number of information calls we typically get during these incidents."

Information flow in crisis situations is no game. In Hampton, the 311 Call Center has integrated this vital disaster response and recovery function into an ongoing customer service program that can be ramped up as needed.

For more information, contact Liz Nisley at (757) 727-8311.

## Enhanced GPS narrows field for responders

**E**mergency responders will now be able to pinpoint locations up to 10 times more accurately than previously possible with enhanced signals from the orbiting Defense Department Global



Positioning System or GPS satellites.

The improved accuracy is the result of a May 1 order by President Clinton

to halt use of a degradation system that prevented the signals from being used by hostile countries in targeting the U.S.

The better signals mean GPS may become the best way to locate the position of emergency 911 calls. Until now, a GPS-based navigation system could give the location of the vehicle to within about 100 meters. (Excerpted from *Emergency Preparedness News*, May 9, 2000)

# Training Calendar

## Emergency Management

### Mass Fatalities Incident Management

June 20-22/Williamsburg

### EOC Management & Operations

July 11-13/Newport News

### Leadership & Influence

July 18-20/Richmond

### Exercise Design

July 26-27/Lynchburg

## Reservist Training

### Rapid Assessment Workbook

Overview — July 8/Richmond

## Search and Rescue

### Basic SAR Dog Workshop

July 15-16/Mount Jackson

### SAR Council

July 29/Richmond

## Technological Hazards

### Hazmat Planning & Management

June 19-21/Fredericksburg

### Public Safety Response to Terrorism — Awareness

June 25/Spotsylvania

July 9/Waynesboro

### Public Safety Response to Terrorism — Management Considerations

July 12-13/Amherst County

Contact Pat Collins at (804) 897-6500, ext. 6568, or e-mail [pcollins.des@state.va.us](mailto:pcollins.des@state.va.us) for more information on terrorism awareness courses.

## Stafford Act (continued from page 1)

We in Virginia may soon have to become comfortable with this prospect. We are looking at a world where you can expect to see graduated levels of disasters and categories that determine what types of events are eligible for outside assistance.

The Disaster Field Office could become a memory for many “smaller events” as block grants become the mechanism for distributing recovery dollars. Proposals are being considered to change the temporary housing program and make individual and family grants 100 percent federally funded. Change is needed to ensure we have clean statutory authority to access dollars to respond to a broad spectrum of hazards. The disaster victim should come first without any question about the funding source.

### “Disaster Jeopardy” (Weapons of Mass Destruction)

On that same note, we all know a terrorist event has much the same impact on the community as a natural disaster. The potential is there for injuries and death, public and private property damages and a whole host of other issues.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Defense, and the intelligence community all have robust funding for deterrence and prosecution. Yet, there is no clear line as to who will pay for response to and recovery from Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) events.

The Stafford Act needs to be **THE** U.S. emergency authority, and there is a real need for a national strategy to address the entire range of activities for which this authority can be used. That idea has been the hallmark of the Gilmore Commission’s\* review of U.S. WMD response capabilities. Proposed language changes would bring order to chaos by ensuring a level of consistency in federal disaster assistance coordination and provide an avenue for consequence management.

The story is simple. Stafford Act revision is inevitable and will significantly affect the way we do business. The time is now to think globally and to act locally in charting our destinies at both the state and local level.

*\*National Advisory Panel to Assess Domestic Response Capabilities for Terrorism Involving Weapons of Mass Destruction (also known as The Gilmore Commission)*

## Hampton Roads ‘Expos(es)’ hurricane hazards

What is the outlook for the 2000 hurricane season in Hampton Roads and what can citizens do now to better prepare for this hazard?

The Hampton Roads Emergency Management Committee will try to answer these questions with a series of Hurricane Expos. York County and Virginia Beach have already sponsored events in their localities. Upcoming expos/sponsors follow:  
Aug. 5 — Patrick Henry Mall (Newport News/York County/Poquoson, Hampton/James City County)

Sep. 9 — Chesapeake Square Mall (Chesapeake)

Contact Don Druitt at (757) 269-2900 for more information.



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